

Who Can Stand Before Him?

Sad Events

There is a poetic account of the loss of the Ark in Psalm 78:

*56 ...they tested and provoked the
Most High God,*

And did not keep His testimonies,

*57 But turned back and acted
unfaithfully like their fathers;*

*They were turned aside like a
deceitful bow.*

*58 For they provoked Him to anger
with their high places,*

*And moved Him to jealousy with
their carved images.*

*59 When God heard this, He was
furious,*

And greatly abhorred Israel,

*60 So that He forsook the tabernacle
of Shiloh,*

The tent He had placed among men,

*61 And delivered His strength into
captivity,*

*And His glory into the enemy's
hand.*

*62 He also gave His people over to
the sword,*

*And was furious with His
inheritance.*

*63 The fire consumed their young
men,*

*And their maidens were not given in
marriage.*

*64 Their priests fell by the sword,
And their widows made no*

lamentation.

*65 Then the Lord awoke as from
sleep,*

*Like a mighty man who shouts
because of wine.*

*66 And He beat back His enemies;
He put them to a perpetual
reproach.*

The Philistines Take The Ark (1 Sam. 5:1)

1 Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

- In Samuel, you will notice the Ark making many voyages. This is central to the Book, and it prepares us for the story of David.
- Hophni and Phinehas carried the Ark out of Shiloh, and now the Philistines were carrying it off. God will be worshipped by all, but He will not be used by any!
- Things now looked dark for Israel. They had lost the Ark and their High Priest.
- Notice: they make no attempt to get the Ark back

Dagon Bows Before The Lord (1 Sam. 4:2-5)

2 When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon. 3 And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and set it in its place again. 4 And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso was left of it. 5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

- The Philistines interpreted the results of the battle as a sign that Dagon, their god, had defeated Yahweh. (Like the story of Samson in Judges 16.)
- Placing the Ark in Dagon's house meant that they saw God as a servant to Dagon, just as they viewed Israel as their servant.

- Dagon was perhaps their highest god. Many think he was worshiped under the form of a fish, or maybe a merman. He was considered the father of the god Baal and, like Baal, a god of weather and of war.
- Dagon's idol fell twice, proving it wasn't an accident!



Possible idol of Dagon made by the Assyrians, ~700 B.C.

About The Threshold

- Thresholds were considered boundaries to special or holy places.
- The destruction of Dagon and the placing of his head and hands on the threshold was a sign he did not even have power in his own sacred space.
- YHWH had conquered him!
- See the blindness of unbelievers, who never think to abandon their gods.
- People remain hardened until the Holy Spirit draws them to Christ!

God Strikes Philistia With Plagues (1 Sam. 5:6-9)

6 But the hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. 7 And when the men of Ashdod saw how it was, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our god." 8 Therefore they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?"

And they answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath." So they carried the ark of the God of Israel away. 9 So it was, after they had carried it away, that the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction; and He struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them.

- People debate what this plague was. Older Bibles say hemorrhoids, but modern commentators say it simply refers to tumors.
- They quickly get rid of the Ark! Why choose Gath? We don't know.
- In their pride, they still try to control Yahweh.

Ekron Says No! (1 Sam. 5:10-12)

10 Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. So it was, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!" 11 So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people." For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. 12 And the men who did not die were stricken with the tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

- The people of Ekron don't seem to have wanted to play this game.
- The cry of the afflicted went up to Heaven, but did that cry influence Heaven? Was it a sincere prayer?

Return The Ark To Him (1 Sam. 6:1-3)

1 Now the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. 2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, "What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it to its place."

3 So they said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but by all means return it to Him with a trespass offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you."

- The reference to seven months may be meant to show us that this was a perfect work of God, because seven is the number of spiritual perfection.
- After seven months, the Philistines give up.
- The diviners were those who were in contact with the spirit world. The Israelites were forbidden to practice divination.

- The Philistines understood the concept of a trespass offering.

Two Milk Cows (1 Sam. 6:4-9)

4 Then they said, “What is the trespass offering which we shall return to Him?”

They answered, “Five golden tumors and five golden rats, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines. For the same plague was on all of you and on your lords. 5

Therefore you shall make images of your tumors and images of your rats that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from your land. 6 Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He did mighty things among them, did they not let the people go, that they might depart? 7 Now

therefore, make a new cart, take two milk cows which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart; and take their calves home, away from them. 8 Then take

the ark of the LORD and set it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you are returning to Him as a trespass offering in a chest by its side. Then send it away, and

let it go. 9 And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that struck us—it happened to us by chance.”

- The religious leaders tell the people to send Yahweh five golden tumors and five golden rats. This was an acknowledgment that the God of Israel had struck them.
- The rats may indicate that the plague was bubonic plague.
- The diviners had better information about how Yahweh had struck Egypt.
- They also admitted that God had power over their gods.
- They would send the Ark back on a cart, which was against Yahweh’s Law.

- They would take two cows and yoke them together, and send them away. What was potentially supernatural about that?

The Ark Back In Israel (1 Sam. 6:10-18)

10 Then the men did so; they took two milk cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. 11 And they set the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the chest with the gold rats and the images of their tumors. 12 Then the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right hand or the left. And the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh.

13 Now the people of Beth Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley; and they lifted their eyes and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it. 14 Then the cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and stood there; a large stone was there. So they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. 15 The Levites took down the ark of the LORD and the chest that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone. Then the men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices the same day to the LORD. 16 So when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day.

17 These are the golden tumors which the Philistines returned as a trespass offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron; 18 and the golden rats, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both fortified cities and country villages, even as far as the large stone of Abel on which they set the ark of the LORD, which stone remains to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

- These two, simple cows knew their Master, but Eli's two sons did not!

- Also, there is a possible contrast with Dagon.
- The Israelites rejoiced, but still didn't follow the Law.
- What's worse, they shouldn't have been so ignorant, because Beth Shemesh was a Levitical city. It's a shame when the religious experts don't even know the Word.

Who Can Stand Before Him? (1 Sam. 6:19-21)

19 Then He struck the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck fifty thousand and seventy men of the people, and the people lamented because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter. 20 And the men of Beth Shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? And to whom shall it go up from us?" 21 So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath Jearim, saying, "The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down and take it up with you."

- Now He is striking His own people for looking into the Ark.
- What about the 50,700 people? This may mean 70 Israelites and 50,000 Philistines were killed over the course of this whole story.
- Notice that the Israelites are now in the same position as the Philistines.
- They had asked the right question, which was: *"Who can stand before this holy God, Yahweh?"* But they did nothing about it.
- The Ark would now rest for a long time among "people of wood," people with a bit more humility.
